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Massachusetts Federation of Churches. Quarterly bulletin. Facts and factors. October 1910
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The church and country life. Pamphlet issued
by the Board of Home Missions of the Presby-
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Department of Church and Labor, the Board of Home Missions
of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 156 Fifth Ave., New York

The Church and the Transient

By WARREN H. WILSON, Ph.D.

IN sizing up his job the country minister has usually omitted the hired man and the tenant farmer. They are his proper task, but unfortunately he has satisfied himself with the conspicuous citizen, the "well-fixed" farmers, the good contributors, the intelligent people, the households in which books are read. These people do not need him and are a false measure of the church's task in the community. It is true that the children in their houses are a part of his work. But family for family the minister is misled who chooses the "well-fixed" people and ignores the people on the margin of the community.

In the early days it was well enough, while the country was being settled, for society to be valued by the first specimens of success. The conspicuous citizen whom the town "turned out" was a real sample of what the town could do. Initial utility valued the men of the churches. But to-day we must go by final utility and measure the town in which a



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new economy is necessary by the man on the margin of life. This man is the tenant farmer and the hired hand. The churches in the country will stand or fall in closely organized society by their service to these marginal people.

This law works in actual experience. The minister who will spend his time in seeking the working people of a country community will secure everybody. If he gets the tenant farmers, he will find the land owners will get him. If he wants the hired man, he will be himself sought by the farmer. That is what it means to live and work in an organized community. The close, muscular vitality of modern social life brings responses from marvelous quarters to the activities of the church. The minister who understands the right point of attack will find that he merely pushes the button, and the community does the rest.

The reason for this social face-about of the church is in the compact nature of modern life and the hard time some people are having merely to live in the community. This hard time is felt in the country, as well as in the city, by people on the edge of the community. The church's business is with the people who are having the hard time. Because until religion is made possible for them it is of little value to anybody. When a church renders service to the people having a hard time it is welcomed by everybody.

To be perfectly plain, the country minister's job is with the people who are becoming, not with the people who have arrived. The latter

are for him to enjoy, but the former are the object of his work. His activities are to be bestowed upon the children, who are ever arriving and have yet to establish their relation to the community. His attention is to be upon the industrious and needy family, who are struggling, or are ceasing to struggle through discouragement, because if he helps them he helps all. His efforts have the greatest value for all classes in the community when they are bestowed upon the drifting and uncertain classes, who come and go, but out of whom the texture of the social life of the town is being knit up or raveled out. His job is with the margin of the fabric, because he is the weaver.

This is what Jesus did. He frankly said he had not time and had not business with the well-to-do, the healthy and righteous, who did solicit his attention, and he defended himself for keeping company with publicans and sinners by his three stories about the lost piece of silver, the lost sheep and the lost son. If you take these stories to the professor of sociology he will tell you they are scientifically correct. They are fundamental to every constructive social program.

The country minister has to serve the community. His business is not with any calling list or limited social class. His business is with those people whom if he serve, he serves all. His life is to be given to those portions of the community, which being fertilized, the whole of the town will bear fruit. Jesus described this task and this method in his Beati-

tudes, in which he blessed "the poor," "those who mourn," "those who are hungry," and those who are ostracized.

Jesus was not "class conscious." He was no demagogue. He worked for all his people by serving the people on the margin of the Jewish commonwealth. The service of a minister to a rural community to-day begins when he devotes his energies to the tenant farmer, the hired hands, the growing young people and to any other classes of persons whose position in the community is not established, but doubtful. These marginal folk are the true measure of his efficiency as a minister.





